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VIEWS:

RELATIVE TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF A RAILWAY

FROM HALIFAX TO QUEBEC,

BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT;

AS THE MOST EFFICIENT AND ECONOMICAL MEANS

OF PROMOTING THE PROSPERITY OF THE

BRITISH NORTH AMERICAN COLONIES;

AND SECURING THEIR CONTINUED CONNECTION

WITH THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT AND

THEIR ESTABLISHMENT IN A

FEDERAL UNION.

ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE OF NOVA SCOTIA,

BY THE

HON. HENRY H. COGSWELL,

Written in September, 1851.

HALIFAX, N. S.

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1852.

VIEWS,

ETC.

[It may be necessary to state that the following remarks were written in the summer of 1851, before legislative action had been taken upon the scheme which so much excited the public mind, commonly called Mr. Howe's plan. They were not then published for fear of the appearance of hostility. As the charge of interference can no longer be made, they are now at the request of friends, with diffidence submitted to the public.]

The great object of British North America under the fostering care of the Imperial Government, appears to be the development of her resources, thereby to provide employment for a healthful and vigorous emigration of the surplus population of Great Britain and Ireland who are there burdensome and expensive, and thus with great benefit to herself, to furnish a distressed people with a prosperous and happy home in British territory.

One might reasonably suppose that the advantages mutually to be derived by the British Government and these Colonies, would almost necessarily lead to the accomplishment in a very short time of so important an object.

Providence has bestowed on these Provinces the elements of wealth in as boundless profusion as upon any portion of the Globe. Our Agriculture, Fisheries, Navigation, Shipbuilding, (for which our forests supply inexhaustible materials,) and our mineral resources —all require an immense amount of human labor for their development. None of these interests will interfere with those of Great Britain, but on the contrary their expansion will diminish British pauperism, and give employment to the British agriculturist, no longer able to obtain it at home by the operation of Free Trade. It seems only necessary on the present occasion to give a general sketch of what may be supposed to have retarded the increase of our own population and the development of our resources to the present time, and to suggest the measures necessary to be carried into effect to ensure future prosperity. The tide of Emigration from Europe has of late years directed its course to the United States, where the industry of the Emigrant is encouraged and protected by enormous impost duties. Experience has shewn us that we do not and cannot prosper under the circumstances in which we are placed; our principal Agricultural productions and the products of our Fisheries (equal to any in the world) heavily taxed in the only foreign markets which require them and no counter-vailing duties imposed on our own part for our defence; high bounties and extraordinary privileges being granted by Foreign Countries to encourage their fishermen in our neighbourhood, and no encouragement being given by us to our own, not even amounting to protection from the encroachment of foreigners or the enforcement of Treaty stipulations; we are placed in a very disadvantageous situation and suffer severely as British Colonists. Such seems to be our position that no man or company would take the responsibility of inviting even one hundred able bodied men healthy vigorous poor Emigrants, or ten men with £1000 each to make this their home—on the contrary, the most robust, active and enterprising young persons of our population are daily leaving us, for countries where their industrial pursuits are fostered, encouraged, and protected.

The first object which presents itself to our notice as now engrossing all our thoughts and which would be most likely to lead to the introduction and employment of Emigrants and the development of our resources is the Construction of a Railroad from Halifax to Quebec.

This measure in its present aspect, originated in a letter from the Colonial Office, was advocated in England by our Countryman, the Hon. Joseph Howe, and will soon be submitted to the calm consideration of the Legislature of these Colonies.

It can hardly be imagined or perhaps desired, that the proposition of Earl Grey, munificent as it appears to be on the part of Great Britain, will ever be accepted by all these Colonies without much modification. It may, however, form the basis of future negociation, but delay, so much to be deprecated, appears to be inevitable.

The offer of a loan of five millions sterling at an interest of 3½ per cent. upon the conditions stipulated will not appear in so bright a light when submitted to the rigid calculation of a Financier. The offer of the Colonial Secretary contemplates the payment

of the interest upon the capital together with 3 per cent annually, in liquidation of the principal and the united security of these Colonies, by the establishment of permanent taxes, until the whole debt and interest shall have been paid.

These permanent taxes to pay the annual instalments amounting to upwards of £400,000 currency per annum, will be very distasteful to the Colonies, and place the British Government and themselves in the invidious if not antagonistic position of creditor and debtor to an enormous amount. If ever in these Colonies, faction should prevail and under the influence of Demagogues a morbid desire to start aside from British allegiance should unfortunately gain the ascendancy, the result might be ruinous to our character, the temptation to evade the payment of the debt proving possibly too strong. We might be instigated by the advice and with the assistance of our neighbours to imitate their example; this would stamp an eternal stigma of repudiation upon the infancy of what must become, with honest dealing and the development of our resources, an immense empire.

Let us coolly examine how much the British Government are prepared to sacrifice for the benefit of these Colonies, leaving out of consideration the prospect afforded of a happy home for her surplus population, now maintained in workhouses and poor asylums at an enormous expense. The 3 per cent stocks have for a long time ranged at about 97. It therefore requires but little calculation to find the value of 3½ per cent stock which may be stated as follows:—If to procure an annuity or dividend of £3, requires £97—how much will be required to purchase a dividend of £3 10s. The answer must be £113, and a fraction, leaving the handsome bonus of 13 per cent brokerage or profit to the British Government.

But the proposition, although accepted by the Hon. Mr. Howe not only for this Province but for New Brunswick and the Canadas, appears likely to encounter many difficulties; the very circumstance of the hasty acceptance of the proposition, without consultation with the able Statesmen of our Sister Colonies and almost ignoring their talents and influence, will probably weaken cordiality of co-operation, if not excite opposition to some important details. Mr. Howe should have known or he will know in the process of the work, that Statesmen representing as great interests as himself, will not consent to play the subordinate part assigned them.

Should the Legislative bodies of these Colonies agree to the proposition and appoint Commissioners to carry the work into effect, their local feelings and desire to promote local interests, and their exertions to obtain too great a share of the power, patronage, and emoluments incident to their office may lead to difficulties in the expeditious and economical prosecution of the work; and the want of a great controlling power to appeal to, would be severely felt, and injuriously retard operations. The proposition that Royal Commissioners should be appointed to superintend the work and expend the money so borrowed can hardly be expected to meet the approbation of the borrowers.—Surrounded, therefore, as the scheme accepted by Mr. Howe appears to be, with difficulties and dangers, apprehensions may be entertained that much valuable time must elapse before even the commencement of this work, so essential to the interests of all the colonies of British North America, and it is presumed of Great Britain also.

It may, therefore, be desirable that some plan should be prepared, to fall back upon, should Mr. Howe not succeed in the plan, which he has advocated.

Various schemes were brought to the notice of the British Government for the construction of the Railroad. Amongst the earliest, and perhaps the only one which suggested its formation by the British Government, was one submitted to the Right Honorable Earl Grey, through the leader of our Provincial Government, on the 14th of March, 1847, by a person here in private life, but who was desirous of promoting the interests of his native country. He requested the present leader of our Government to place it in the hands of our Colonial Minister, hoping that that distinguished officer would carry out the great object, or at least place it before the British Parliament. This was not done and it was never published.—It seems to possess some merit and consideration even now, and as few objections as most of the others.

In a work of this immense magnitude and of such vast political importance, it seems that the management can only with safety be entrusted to the Supreme Government, or at least to the general legislature of these Colonies, after the establishment of a general confederation of their local Governments.—The destiny of these Colonies can never with safety be committed to the charge of a private company, however numerous, wealthy and loyal, without great restrictions, and conditions, which would paralyze the exertions and perhaps outrage the feelings of many members of the company, but the ownership of a belt of twenty miles of land, along the line, would place the gates and keys of British North America in the hands of the Company, who might perhaps transfer their rights to foreigners; and the copartnership of the three Colonies having distinct and separate Governments with various interests and political views, might not always act harmoniously, and should either legislative member of the copartnership wish to sever the connexion, it might be extremely difficult to coerce continued unity of action.

Under these impressions the writer of the following sketch submitted his suggestion to Earl Grey, more than 4½ years ago, and although much light has been thrown upon the subject and much discussion taken place, and more liberal offers made by the local Governments than were anticipated by the writer, he thinks his views were substantially correct; at any rate, he thinks it but right to submit his statement to public consideration, subject to any modification which so great a lapse of time and change of circumstances may render expedient. Perhaps, the united prayers of the Legislatures might even now induce the Imperial Parliament to

construct the Railroad upon receiving what the Colonial Legislatures have already agreed to contribute towards the great object. If it should be supposed by the British Government that these Colonies should contribute all the funds necessary for the completion of the whole work, it appears to be a far more eligible course for these Colonies to impose reciprocal duties upon all countries, and apply the proceeds scrupulously to the formation of the Railroad, than to adopt Mr. Hawes's proposition to obtain a loan from the British Government.

Suggestions relative to the formation of a Railroad from Halifax to Quebec, submitted to the Right Honble. Earl Grey, in March, 1847, through J. B. Uniacke, Esq., Secretary of the Railroad Committee of Nova Scotia.

I suppose all parties are now waiting for the action of Government, and their attention is too much occupied in cases of life and death under their immediate view* to admit of deliberate consideration of Colonial Interests; but if there ever were a time when a Colonial Secretary was competent to the task of carrying out a large, comprehensive, and well digested plan for the improvement of the North American Colonies, we confidently believe that we have now, in the person of Earl Grey, the very statesman we require. We believe, also, that His Lordship will be ably seconded by our Governor General, who, we anticipate will do more for the welfare of these Provinces, than any of his predecessors have been capable of doing. You have probably had interviews with Lord Grey, and most probably the Railroad has been the subject of conversation and you may possibly be in possession of His Lordship's views. Rumour states that they are favorable to a confederation of these Colonies. The completion of the Railroad will leave no apparent obstacle in the way of such a measure, as the communication between Halifax and Quebec will be as easy as between Halifax and Annapolis, and the Supreme Courts of Justice can then be held in the different Provinces of the Government with as much ease and at no greater interval of time than now exists in the sitting of our Supreme Courts in the different counties of this Province. Besides, the transport of troops and the munitions of war would be so much facilitated, that two-thirds, or perhaps one half the number of troops would be more efficient in repressing any disturbances in the Provinces or repelling a foreign foe, than are now rendered necessary by the difficulties of inter-communication. Such being my opinion, in which I trust you will coincide, the formation of the Railroad is essentially of such character as to entitle it to the consideration of the Colonial Secretary, and through him that of the Imperial Government.

You may perhaps enquire, what suggestions I have to make, to induce the Imperial Parliament to engage in so extensive and expensive an undertaking for these Colonies, which might call for an expenditure of three or four millions of money. I cannot state my views in extenso in this communication, but your intimate knowledge of the subject will enable you to comprehend all the matters in connection therewith which I may omit.—I have not access to the Crown Land Department for the information which it may afford, but Earl Grey can by his command acquire accurate knowledge; it is said there are about five million acres of Crown Land upon the proposed line of Railroad. This immense tract of land is now of very small value, but were the Railroad completed it would produce as many pounds, including the numerous stations which might be required on the line as depots for articles to be forwarded by the Rail Cars, which would command a price of at least an hundred pounds per acre.

The Railroad line would traverse immense coal fields now of no value, but it is believed that were the line completed, the transport of coals to Quebec and Halifax, would if conducted by the Government and without reservation of the Royalty, defray the annual expense. It has been asserted that an inexhaustible supply of coals can be placed in the Rail cars at a sum not exceeding 5s per chaldron and the difference between that sum and the selling price at Halifax and Quebec would accrue to the Railroad as a profit.—The Rail Engines would also receive their supply in passing to and fro, at that small price. It may be said that this arrangement would interfere with the rights of the mining company, but surely the Government might effect a compromise, as the company cannot now, nor ever work these mines unless the Railroad be completed. There can be little doubt therefore, that for an object of such importance they would relinquish a monopoly which already bears very hard upon the interest of these Provinces. Besides, their Shipping Ports of Sydney and Pictou could not be interfered with.

Thus you may perceive that if my views approach correctness, abundant funds will be furnished for the completion of the work by the Government, who would then have the entire management of its concerns, without any interference, together with its collateral powerful auxilliary, the Electric Telegraph, which in time of war, it would be of immense importance to possess. All the troops in these Colonies might be concentrated in one spot in the course of two or three days after notice, and as fresh and prepared for action as at the hour they might leave their respective barracks.

It seems only necessary that the Imperial Parliament should sanction the advances for the Railroad until completed, and then the lands, the mines, and minerals, would most probably repay the whole advance.

But as these Colonies will be much benefitted by the Railroad, it is not too much to expect, and I think little doubt can be entertained that they will cheerfully grant one tenth part of their net revenue for 10 years, towards so important an object. The sum thus granted by the Colonial Legislature,

*In Ireland.

would amount to half a million, and the firm impression on my mind is, that in the ten succeeding years, they would be repaid the whole sum by an an increased revenue under the same tariff.

The machinery for carrying out this mighty enterprise should be under the control and management of the Imperial Government and its officers in the Colonies—I beg to suggest a crude outline of the mode. The number of persons named may be enlarged or diminished at pleasure of the Government. Suppose we take 10,000 as the number of persons to be employed upon the whole line. Let 1000 be selected from the Royal Engineers and Artillery and troops of the line whose period of service has nearly expired and who would volunteer to engage in this service for a certain period, or until the completion of the service—all of these would be competent to discharge the duties of non-commissioned officers and superintend the labor of the 9000, under the direction of experienced Engineers and Military Officers. Let the 9000 be composed of Emigrants, able bodied and well calculated to use the axe and the spade. All such persons should of course be entitled for this particular service to receive military pay and rations and clothing, and be subject to military orders and control, and be entitled, at their discharge, upon the completion of the work, to grants of land, from 5 to 50 acres, upon the line of the Railroad, upon which for the purpose of extensive accommodation each should have but a small front; these small allotments might be made the rewards of good conduct to such persons as may render faithful, diligent, and conspicuous services during the performance of the work.

Great quantities of valuable timber must be removed from the lines of the Road—this might be profitably used for the erection of cabins on the line and converted into boards and shingles for station houses, &c. This department of the service might be as well prosecuted in the winter as the summer and when little labor could be successfully employed in the formation of the Road. The buildings and cabins could be used for the accommodation of the labourers during the performance of the work and afterwards applied to the purposes of Rail-cars and the accommodation of the settlers. These laborers also will be eminently useful to all persons who may be engaged on the Road and desirous of settling permanently, in instructing them at the expense of Government in the mysteries of a forest life, so difficult of acquisition by an emigrant who leaves a dense population to earn his living in the bush.—Mills for the manufacture of wood, would spring up, in every river on the line of the Road, and little doubt can be entertained that the timber on many lots, would, over and above clearing the land, leave a profit to the owner.—And let no one fear, by having his land cleared of wood, that he will be destitute of fuel, as he can for the reasons aforesaid, receive an abundance from the Coal fields which will be traversed by the Road.

Such is the rough outline of the Railroad from Halifax to Quebec. To do justice to its details would require a volume; it merely contains hints which if you agree in their correctness, and will seek an opportunity to submit to them to Earl Grey; should they meet His Lordship's approbation, I entertain little doubt will speedily be carried into effect. His Lordship's powerful intellect will grasp the subject in the important bearings connected with it and flowing from it.

With even 10,000 men accustomed to military discipline settled along the road, it will have as great an influence in repressing riots and repelling invasion as any Fortifications that could be built.

The confederation of these Colonies, and the Establishment of a Vice Royalty could then meet with no obstacle. A great diminution of expense in the erection of fortifications and Military force in these Colonies might result and immediate accommodation for at least 1,000,000 emigrants be provided I cannot in any view which I take of the subject, and allowing for the most liberal acts of the Government in free grants to Emigrants employed upon the Road, conceive it possible that the Cost of the Railroad to the Imperial Government can amount to one million, and the carriage of Coals alone would more than pay the Interest of that sum.

This should emphatically be a Government measure and the Railroad, but more particularly the Electric Telegraph, should be under Imperial management.

I think, my dear Sir, had the Electric Telegraph been in operation the last Summer and had the Government transmitted here, by the last Steamer, after the fact was ascertained the intelligence of the extent of the supply of Flour and provisions which would be required to meet the destitution in Ireland, and such intelligence communicated by Telegraph to Quebec, the Commissariat or if such had been the pleasure of Government, British merchants might have purchased in the United States an abundant supply at a saving of at least one million of pounds sterling.

Such being my views, you may perhaps enquire why I have not endeavoured to impress their importance and feasibility upon the mind of our excellent Lieut. Governor, and prevail upon him to transmit them with his recommendation to the Colonial Office. My reply is, that in the first place, our Provincial Government only extends over a small portion of the territory to be transversed by the line, and the plan would not be co-operated in so heartily by the other Colonies as would be the case if it originated in a higher authority. Should Earl Grey view the subject favorably and give it his high sanction, the plan would be adopted and go into immediate operation; His Lordship's views would be moulded into the shape and have the authority of an official despatch calling upon the Colonial Legislatures to appropriate one tenth of their Revenues for 10 years to this all important subject.

Besides we know that constitutionally and practically the Right Honorable the Secretary of State for the Colonies is Vice Roy or Governor General of all the British Colonies and wields all the powers and prerogatives of the Crown requisite to carry out his views for the well being and government of the

Colonies. It may be said that the British Government have never undertaken the foundation of a Railroad in the Colonies—true! but none has ever possessed such claims to Imperial regard.

These British Colonies are greater in extent than one of the proudest monarchies of Europe, bound to the British Government by the strongest ties of protection, loyalty, and interest, not to be broken by intestine divisions or attacks of a foreign foe. They could raise a supply of provisions abundant for the ordinary wants of Great Britain and Ireland furnished with an outlet at all seasons of the year to a British market.

This great work can be accomplished by the Government at a small expense.

But I need not enlarge; if you adopt the views you can dilate and illustrate them with far more effect than I can, and prove the advantages of this plan over that of a Company composed of discordant materials, the English Capitalists seeking for the utmost possible profit, and the Colonial Subscribers seeking to draw collateral advantage of agricultural and commercial interests. To your care I commit the subject. I have not mentioned it to any person here.

I am, dear Sir,
Your Obt. Servant,
H. H. COGSWELL.

J. B. Uniacke, Esq., M. P. P.

The foregoing suggestions for the Construction of a Railroad from Halifax to Quebec in the line recommended by the Royal Commissioners, may still merit consideration in case the proposition of the Colonial Secretary which has been accepted by Mr. Howe should from some difficulty in the details not be finally adopted by the Legislatures of these Colonies. Considering the immense magnitude of this enterprise and our Colonial position, with no more advantage in British markets at home, or in other British Colonies than foreigners, with no power to enter into treaty stipulations with foreign governments to obtain reciprocal advantages for our productions and manufactures—and considering the advantages which Great Britain would derive from the construction of this Railroad, a strong claim is made out upon the British Government, for generous and efficient aid to these Colonies. Some of the advantages may be thus briefly recapitulated.

The Railroad and its consequences would absorb the redundant population of Great Britain and Ireland who are now a great burden and expense to the Mother government and provide a happy and prosperous home for every person she could spare. They would become as residents in these Colonies, purchasers to a large amount of British manufactures now fast under the present system being given up for those of the United States, and soon be producers of a supply of Bread Stuffs and provisions at a reasonable rate, in all future time to make up any deficiency in home productions without any reliance upon foreigners.

Some of the advantages derivable to Great Britain must be predicated upon the supposition that she is desirous of retaining these Colonies as a part of her immense empire and at the least possible expense.

The plan contemplated that whatever military force might be considered necessary for the defence and protection of these Colonies in our present state might be diminished one half and be as efficient for such purpose after the formation of the Railroad as the whole can be without it.

The saving thus made might be applied in aid of the railroad fund. Upon inquiry, a tolerably fair estimate might be made of the sum to be so applied—say that the present force of all arms in these Colonies amounts to 12 regiments at the average cost of £30,000 per annum for each regiment—and say that 6 regiments will then be sufficient with a Military Settlement of 10,000 persons along the line of the Road, receiving no military pay, unless embodied in time of war, and the sum of £180,000 per annum would be applicable to the Railroad without pecuniary loss to the British Government, Add to this, the sum of £47,000 per annum which is now paid to the United States Government for the transit of our Mails through its territory, and which then would pass over the Railroad.

A saving would then be made applicable to the road of £227,000 per annum. The interest upon five millions to be advanced from time to time as required would amount altogether to £150,000 per annum, leaving £77,000 per annum as a sinking fund to pay off the principal. Add to the foregoing the Colonial grants of £70,000 per annum for 20 years, and we should have £1,400,000 applicable towards the extinction of the principal, leaving apparently no danger of ultimate pecuniary loss.

Then take into consideration the value of Five millions of acres of land including its minerals, all possessing a Railroad to the markets of Quebec and Halifax. The value of these, after making liberal deductions for free grants to the military settlers, may with railroad stations forming the nuclei of from 50 to 100 cities, be estimated at a sum of at least two millions and a half, immediately applicable to the extinction of the debt.

Should the foregoing view of the subject be considered exaggerated, and should it be ascertained after a fair investigation of the subject—that the British Government, giving full credit for the Savings in the military expenditure and the carriage of the Mails and the Colonial grants, have to advance more, the three Colonial Governments should be required to give security for the repayment of the excess.

The plan was submitted to Earl Grey without the influence of any political bodies to bias His Lordship's deliberate opinion in its favor—perhaps no Colonial Secretary had previously enjoyed a like opportunity of doing so much good, at so small an expense to so many Colonies, confided to his care.

The consequences likely to follow from the performance of this great work might be expected to be something like the following.

The resources of these Colonies would be rapidly developed; our fisheries, equal to any in the world,—now contending with foreign fisheries in our vicinity encouraged by bounties to an enormous amount,—would be augmented to an extent which would enable the fishermen to boast "We draw as much human

food from the waters which surround our shore, as a like number of Agriculturists do, from the lands which they inhabit and cultivate." The Agriculturist might reply "we will undertake to supply Great Britain with all the corn and provisions she may require in aid of home productions at the present low prices, if ever such prices can be secured to us in preference to foreigners."

It is said, that the celebrated Mr. Canning toward the close of his career, in reviewing his political course marked as his greatest achievement, "I have called into existence a new world to redress the balance of the old." How much prouder might have been the boast of Earl Grey, had he availed himself of the opportunities he possessed of constructing the great railroad: "I have provided a happy home for every man in Great Britain and Ireland, wishing to emigrate; I have created a British Empire in the West, the greatest that exists in any quarter of the globe." These emphatic words would have formed as glorious an inscription upon a monument to be erected to his memory in these Colonies, as any recorded Epitaph of any Statesman, in by-gone ages of the world.